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ABSTRACT

A study was undertaken to determine whether a group of 26 parents generalized the use of behavior management techniques to their daily interactions with their developmentally disabled, behavior disordered, or normal preschool children at home. Parents participated in a 10 week course on practical parenting and their parent/child interactions were observed both in a setting in which the parent instructed the child to perform a task and in a free play interaction setting. Results indicated that, in the instructional setting, parents made few changes in their use of differential attention as a function of classroom teaching and the children's behavior did not improve. In the free play setting, however, parents did improve in their use of differential attention and their children's behavior improved. (Author/PHR)

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Group Parent Training: An Analysis of Generalization from Classroom to Home

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Group Parent Training: An Analysis of Generalization from Classroom to Home

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A RESEARCH BRIEF

From:

Kansas Research Institute for Early Childhood

Education of the Handicapped

(ECI Document 116)

February, 1979

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It has been well-documented that parents can be effective agents for behavior change with their children (e.g., Herbert and Baer, 1972). However, typically the training is done on a one-to-one basis between parent and therapist. Given the increasing demands for child-rearing advice as evidenced by the enormous sale of such books as Toilet Training in Less Than a Day by Azrin and Foxx, a more efficient method of transmitting behavior-management techniques to parents has been sought. Programs such as Responsive Parenting (Clark, 1976) and ABC's for Parents (Rettig, 1973) have been developed to teach parents as a gorup, child-management techniques in response to this need and in an effort to support "preventive mental health" of families. Unfortunately, there is little or no evidence to support the efficacy of generalization from classroom to home of such a didactic approach. What evidence exists, revolves around individual parent project reports (Hall, Axelrod, Tyler, Grief, Jones, and Robertson, 1972) or summary attitude measurements (Mira, 1970) without the hallmarks of behavior analysis, reliability and validity measurements. The purpose of our research was to examine whether parents actually generalized the use of behavior management techniques to their daily interactions with their children at home both in a high instruction period of time and a less structured time such as free play. These techniques had been taught in class and used in the parents' individual projects.

Three groups of parents (n=9, n=8, n=9) participated in three identical ten week "Practical Parenting" courses. The families' socioeconomic and educational levels varied from lower to upper class and from less than high school to Ph.D. completion. Families were referred by day care center, preschool and public school personnel, self-referral, or had children attending normal or special classrooms operated by the university. The children were of preschool age and approximately one-half were developmentally disabled and/or had severe behavior problems.

The class format, schedule, and content approximated that of typical behavioral-management courses (e.g., ABC's for Parenting and/or Responsive Parenting). Each parent also participated in a weekly homecheck. Staff members observed parent-child interactions in two settings, an Instructional Training (IT) setting in which the parent had the child put away toys in several containers and a Free Play (FP) setting in which the parent and child were instructed to interact as they normally would at that time of day. The observers recorded parent and child behaviors in continuous 10-sec intervals.

The data found in Figures 1-3 indicate that in the Instructional Training (IT) setting parents made few changes in their use of differential attention as a function of classroom teaching and the children's behavior did not improve. However, in the Free-Play (FP) setting, parents did improve their use of differential attention resulting in a concomitant improvement in the children's behavior. With the addition of individualized feedback (in-home graphical and verbal feedback paired with self-recording of parent attention), significant improvements were obtained in both the parents' and children's behavior in both the IT and FP settings. The improvements in the FP setting for the initial cohort were of lesser magnitude than those obtained with the second cohort of parents. Additionally, in the second and third cohorts, (See Figures 2 and 3) in which multiple baselines (across settings,

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within families) were employed, the data indicate that a number of families generalized to the FP setting once feedback was instituted in the IT setting.

Figure 4 presents the percent of parents and children making any desired changes as a function of the Class or Class plus Feedback conditions. In the IT setting, parents and fewer children evidenced any improvements although with the addition of feedback all parents and nearly all of the children improved. In the FP setting the Class condition resulted in more parents and children improving than in the IT setting, but again, fewer children than parents improved. The addition of feedback once again resulted in improvements for nearly all of the parents and children.

In summary, these data indicate that parents do make some changes in their use of differential attention in both IT and FP settings as a function of classroom teaching and activities but that these changes were not always sufficient to change their children's behavior. These results strongly suggest that group parent training classes alone are not sufficient to produce generalization of child management skills (e.g., differential attention, time out) unless augmented with some other procedure such as in-home feedback. The results of this study suggest that in-home feedback is an effective procedure in promoting generalization from classroom to home. The efficacy of such group parent training programs as "preventive mental health" programs needs to be validated through data-based analyses.

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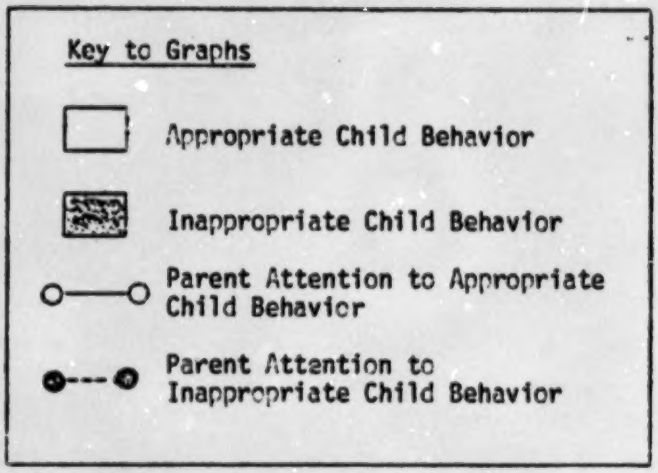

Key to Graphs
Appropriate Child Behavior
Inappropriate Child Behavior
Parent Attention to Appropriate Child Behavior
Parent Attention to Inappropriate Child Behavior

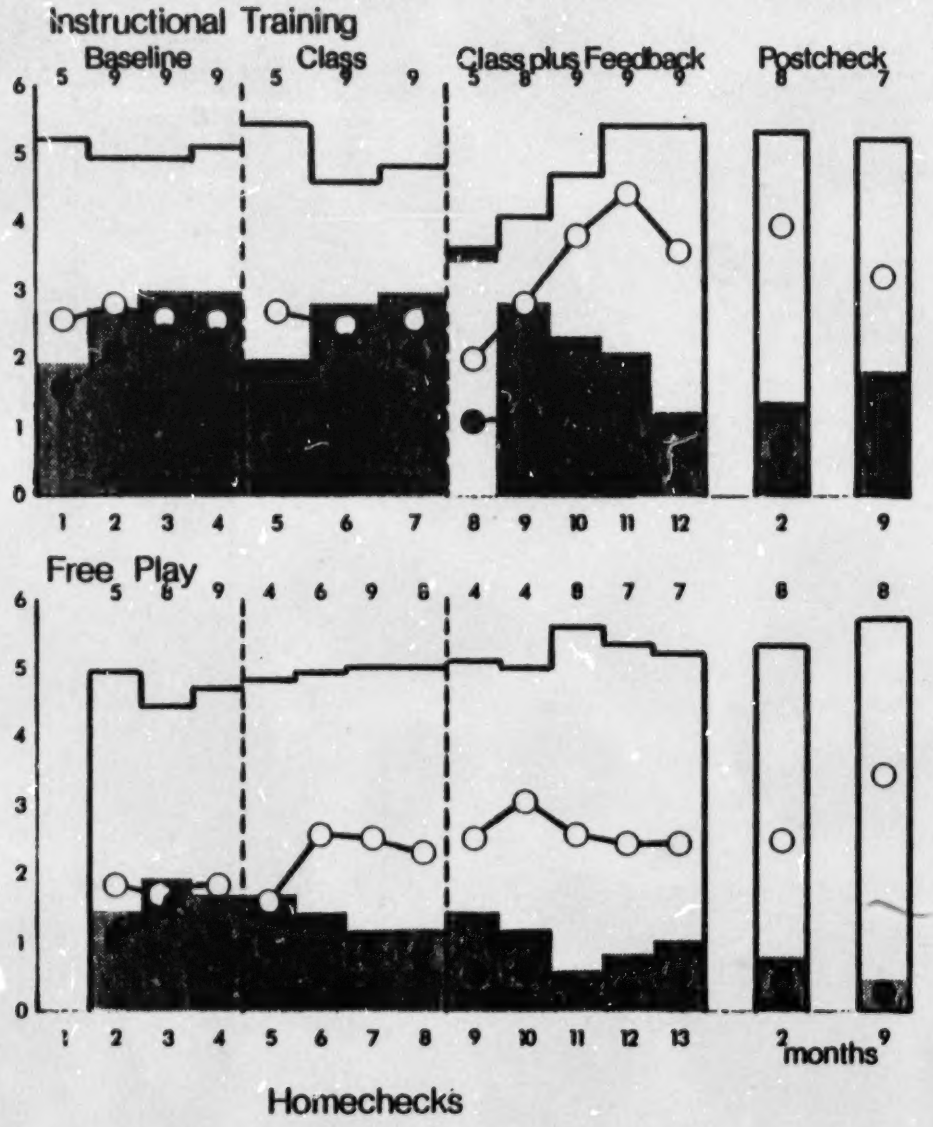


Figure 1

Rate per Minute
Group Means Backwards
Spring 1976

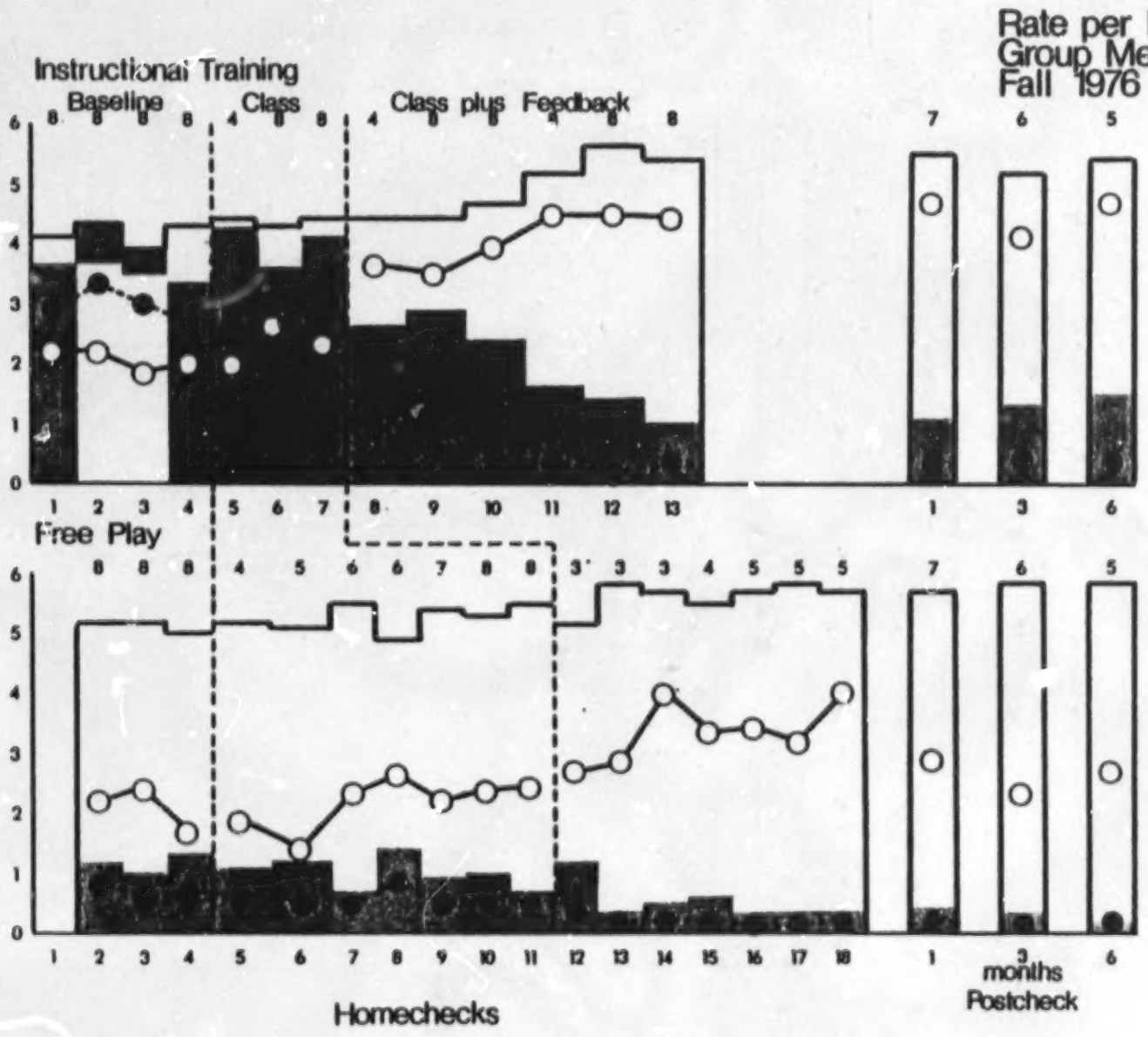
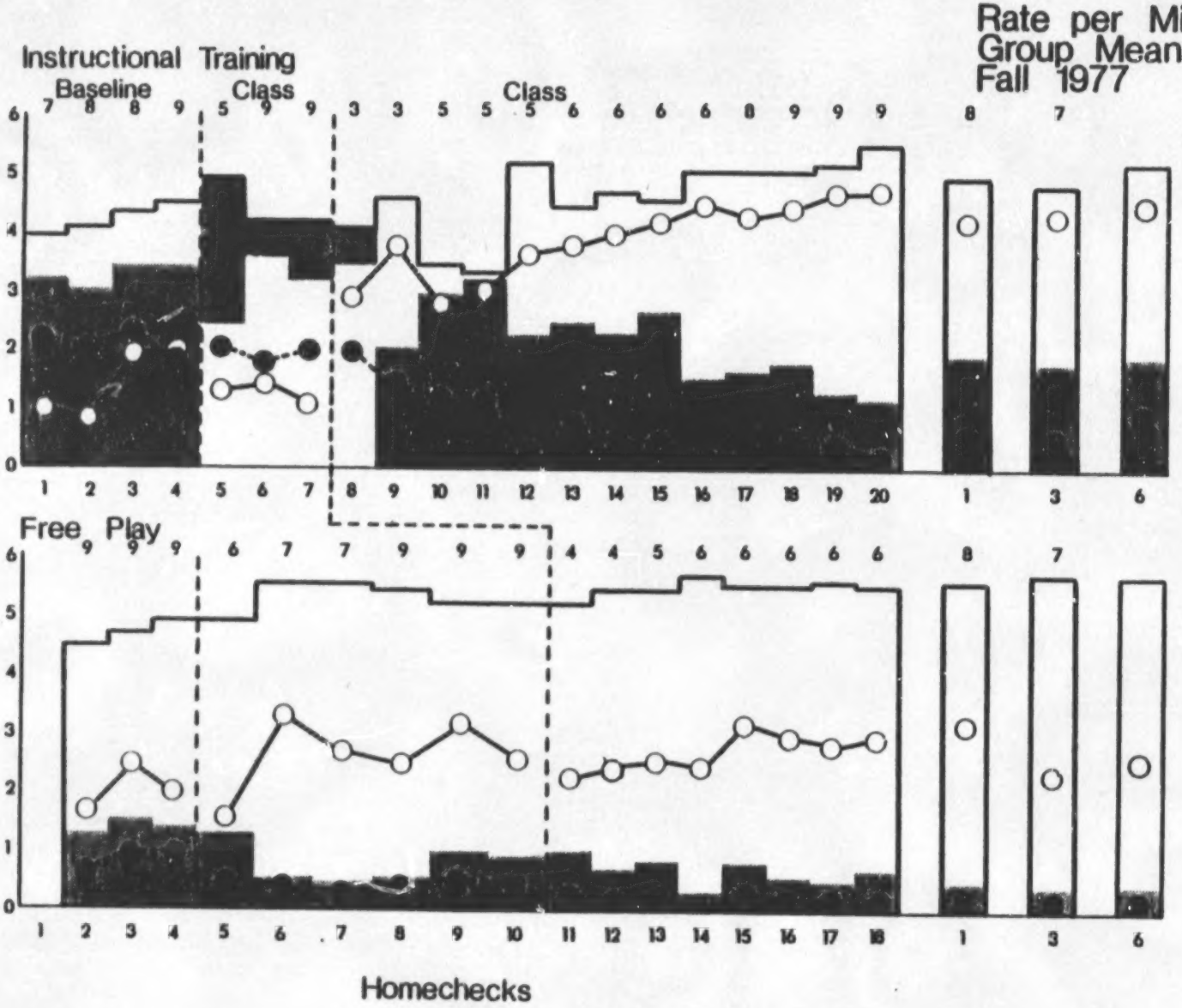

Rate per Minute
Group Means Backwards
Fall 1976
Instructional Training
Baseline
Class
Class plus Feedback
Free Play
Homechecks
months
Postcheck

Figure 2


Rate per Minute
Group Means Backward
Fall 1977
Instructional Training
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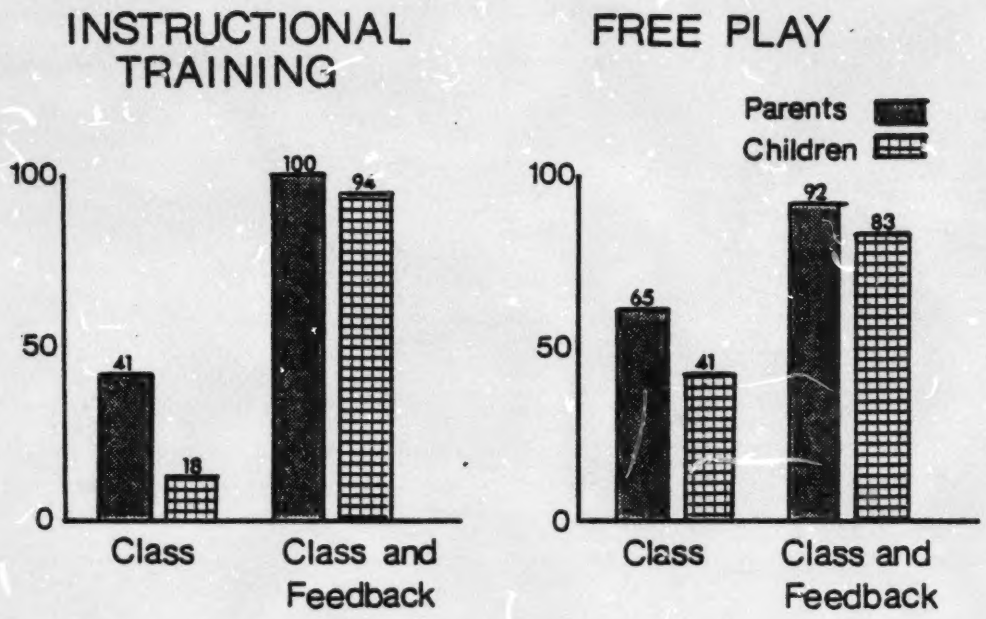
Class
Class
Free Play
Homechecks

Figure 3



Percent of Parents and Children Making Desired Changes

Figure 4